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SUBJECT: USTRANSCOM MEETINGS WITH TAJIK OFFICIALS ON NORTHERN
DISTRIBUTION NETWORK

REF: DUSHANBE 103

CLASSIFIED BY: Tracey A. Jacobson, Ambassador, EXEC, DOS.

REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

11. (C) Summary: Following up on General Petraeus's Northern Distribution Network (NDN) discussions with President Rahmon in January (Ref A), Rear Admiral Mark Harnitchek, USTRANSCOM Director of Strategy, Policy, and Logistics, met with Tajikistan's Minister of Foreign Affairs Hamrohon Zarifi, Minister of Transportation and Communications Abdurahim Ashur, Chief of the State Committee for National Security Khayridin Abdurahimov, and Head of the Customs Service Gurez Zaripov on February 20, 2009, to discuss using Tajikistan territory for the transit of non-lethal cargo via commercial means to support troops in Afghanistan. U.S. Ambassador Tracey Jacobson attended the first two meetings with RADM Harnitchek, and DCM Necia Quast the second two. In all the meetings, Tajik officials expressed full support for the proposal and promised their cooperation. They asked for the United States to consider building a second bridge to Afghanistan at Kokul, and to develop other transportation infrastructure and facilities. End summary.

12. (C) Minister of Foreign Affairs Zarifi expressed support for the use of Tajikistan's territory for the transit of cargo, citing the common goal of stabilizing Afghanistan. He proposed Kolkhozobad and Kulyob as primary nodes, pointing out their proximity to the Afghan border, but acknowledged that neither site currently had the necessary infrastructure to do rail-to-road transloading. He suggested that the United States could assist in developing an intermodal terminal closer to the border. The Ambassador emphasized the importance of getting cargo transit underway as soon as possible, suggesting use of the existing facilities at Kurgan Teppe, before considering other locations that would require substantial development. Minister Zarifi agreed but reiterated keen interest in the stability of Afghanistan and the importance of looking at developing the other alternatives as well. With regard to relations with Uzbekistan, he assured RADM Harnitchek that cargo transit would not be a problem. No final agreement was reached at the meeting. Minister Zarifi accepted a draft U.S. diplomatic note, saying the MFA's lawyers would look at it, and promised a response on the type of agreement documentation they required.

13. (C) After the meeting, a representative of MFA's Americas Desk advised that on February 23 there would be a meeting of the relevant ministries on commercial transit of U.S. cargo. The MFA representative cited a previous U.S. draft diplomatic note and the Ambassador's remarks indicating that this transit would bring economic benefits to the country and asked for a more detailed description of the benefits for the republic to report to the government officials at the meeting. The Ambassador responded that the United States was looking at commercial shipments, using Tajikistan's rail, road, and terminal facilities. The U.S. government would contract with commercial shippers, who would pay customary fees related to shipping, bringing revenues to commercial transit operators. This would be an excellent business opportunity and a chance for Tajikistan to demonstrate its ability to act as a transit country, which could attract attention from other potential customers and investors.

14. (C) Minister of Transportation Ashur began his meeting with the request for U.S. support in constructing a bridge at Kokul. He discussed at some lengths the benefits for both Afghanistan and Tajikistan of this connection. The Ambassador indicated that the request for the Kokul Bridge was being studied but that no commitments had been made; she reiterated the need in the meantime to see the existing bridge at Nizhniy Pyanj used to full capacity. Turning specifically to the NDN issue, Minister Ashur, like the Minister of Foreign Affairs, proposed Kolkhozobad as an intermodal transit point, noting it is the closest railway point to the Afghan border. He acknowledged, however, that there was currently no truck terminal there, so container transloading could not take place. Minister Ashur reported that there were no serious issues in the relationship

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between the Uzbekistan and Tajikistan rail systems, indicating that any small misunderstandings could be resolved at the working level; he assured RADM Harnitchek that there would be no problems with the transit of U.S. cargo. Tajikistan railways work within the framework of the Organization for Cooperation of Railways.

15. (C) Chairman of the GKNB Abdrahimov, who oversees the Border Guards, stated Tajikistan's willingness to help in coalition efforts to stabilize Afghanistan and expressed gratitude for the bridge at Nizhniy Pyanj. He added that "the sooner we build a second bridge at Kokul, the better" for additional transit options. Like the Ministers in the previous meetings, he suggested using Kolkhozobad, citing its proximity to the Afghan border. He reported that operations would be ongoing at the Nizhniy Pyanj Bridge on a 24-hour-a-day basis and that border guard strength there would be plussed up. Finally, he passed to the U.S. side a list of equipment they requested to facilitate operations at the bridge facility, mostly relating to computers/power needs such as UPS, surge protectors, and generators.

16. (C) Head of Customs Service Zaripov emphasized Tajikistan's commitment to engagement and support for development of economic ties with Afghanistan. He said that the Customs Service was ready to cooperate and negotiate on transit of cargo through Tajikistan to assist coalition forces in Afghanistan. Indicating that his tasking came directly from President Rahmon, he assured RADM Harnitchek that there would be a smooth flow of cargo without bureaucratic restraints.

17. (C) Comment: Cargo transit through Tajikistan clearly has support from the highest levels of government. Each meeting was

attended by the minister or agency head who offered full support from his organization. The appearance of the GKNB Director himself was unexpected-usually his deputy leads any meetings-and indicates the importance attached to this issue. Although there is much good political will and strong oral support from the Tajikistan side on the transit issue, no formal agreement has been reached yet. Each of the meetings involved a not-unexpected request for infrastructure development (all mentioned Kolkhozobad and Kulyob) which may be proposed explicitly as a quid pro quo for use of Tajik territory for the cargo transit. End Comment.

18. (U) USTRANSCOM Admiral Harnitchek cleared this message.
JACOBSON